



Affirmation

An Independent Voice for

United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns

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Like Drops of Water

by Diane DeLap

I was probably about 8 or 9 years old when I first saw the Flume Gorge in New Hampshire's Franconia Notch State Park. I remember we were on our annual vacation to New Hampshire, and had rented a lakeside cabin on Silver Lake, NH. We were on one of our "day trips" as my mother called them. These were usually opportunities for my parents to gaze at

beautiful mountain scenery, while I sat, bored, in the back seat of the car, wishing I was back at the lake swimming.

This time though was different. Following a short walk into the woods, we came upon the most amazing sight I had yet

seen in my young life. The Flume Gorge is a 10 to 15 foot wide, 70 foot deep, crack in the granite extending 800 feet into the base of Mount Liberty through which a small stream cascades. Beginning at "Table Rock" at the top,

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Platform Statement Released

The National Council, meeting in Sacramento this January, drafted the General Conference 2004 Platform Statement which summarizes the organization's focus of energy for the General

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Same-Sex Marriage Debated

By Diane DeLap

The Massachusetts legislature is currently in recess without having reached a decision on what to do about the state Supreme Court ruling opening up marriage to same sex couples. Eventually I believe the conservatives in our state will force a vote on this issue. If the powerful national conservative forces behind this can force a constitutional amendment barring same-sex marriage in Massachusetts, one of the most liberal states in the nation, they will have won a great victory – and they know it. Massachusetts is the key battleground for the struggle for freedom once more.

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BY:

Let's Volunteer!

General Conference is less than two months away. In Pittsburgh, thousands of United Methodists will gather to decide and discern the path of the church for the next four years.

Affirmation, Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) and the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) have made a faithful witness at General Conference for decades. Pittsburgh will require no less from us.

There are many ways to be involved with Affirmation, RMN and MFSA. Come to General Conference for a few days or the full two weeks. Volunteer and help out with our shared ministry of hospitality including meals and transportation, participate in one of the many worship opportunities, be a part of the essential office and communications work. We need you!

In Cleveland over 200 people from across the country gathered to volunteer with the Affirmation, RMN and MFSA coalition. While our voices might be tired and our souls weary, this is the time to act. Please check out the MFSA website

(<http://www.mfsaweb.org>) for all volunteer opportunities and to download a volunteer form or use the volunteer form included in this newsletter.

Please remember that General Conference will be in Pittsburgh from April 27 to May 7. Volunteer activities begin on Monday, April 26 (including an in-depth orientation from 3 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.). And all volunteers that are able, should plan to stay until May 8 so we can be present when the last session of General Conference ends late on Friday, May 7. Our groups have arranged for affordable housing and meals. The primary hotel for our volunteers will be the Holiday Inn Express. Make reservations by calling 412-488-1130. You can receive a group rate of \$94/night by telling them you are with "MFSA." You may also email HousingGC04@aol.com to find out about possibilities for sharing a room or check out the low cost housing available at St. Paul of the Cross Retreat Center for only \$20 a night. Information about the retreat center can be found on the MFSA web site.

Affirmation Newsletter

This Affirmation newsletter is a quarterly publication. Only Affirmation's elected spokespersons may represent the official positions of this organization. Opinions here signed or unsigned are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.

Co-Editors:

Judy WestLee
Gary Shephard

Affirmation's Mission Statement

Affirmation is an activist caucus of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, our families and friends organized to speak for ourselves. Together we:

- * Proclaim a gospel of respect, love and justice;
- * Relentlessly pursue policies and processes that support full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in all areas and levels of the United Methodist Church;
- * Overcome the barriers that diminish our common humanity by excluding or judging people because of their race, gender, class or physical abilities;
- * Empower people to undertake works of inclusion and justice where they are.

So, Now Where Do We Go?

By Peggy Gaylord

On the occasion of the Celebration of the Fifth Anniversary of Jeanne Barnett's and Ellie Charlton's Holy Union, Affirmation's Co-spokesperson was asked to address the issue of where we go from here. The following is Peggy's response.

Let me start with a little history as a reference point for the journey forward. Affirmation began in 1975 and has been a presence at General Conference since 1976. The first homosexual restrictive legislation was added to the Book of Discipline in 1972 (many of us having reached adulthood without any prohibitions), then more was added in 1976, and for many people within Affirmation, 1980 was a water-shed year, like GC 2000 was for some of us here. In 1984 after what was a devastating vote for many, Affirmation came back the next day and invited churches to become Reconciling Congregations, giving birth to a new movement across the denomination.

In 1988 Affirmation published a new strategic visioning plan. One of the results was to spin off the Reconciling Congregation Program. We had hoped that this would allow RCP to develop a much broader grass roots base than we felt we could do as a predominantly gay and lesbian organization. I think some of us had naively hoped that this new organization to which we had given birth would encounter less hatred and animosity. In some ways, I think that was true at times. But, as Kathryn Johnson of the Methodist Federation for Social Action and Cathy Knight of the Reconciling Ministries Network reminded me last summer, our opposition frequently lumps us all together.

As we are celebrating today, life goes on between General Conferences. Not only do we keep planting seeds abundantly that we hope will take hold, we also count on what I call the "diaspora effect." Jeanne and Ellie were longtime members of Affirmation at the time they decided to make their love publicly known. Look at the impact

of the decision initially only two people made, and then so many others joined in.

We in Affirmation are in the process of a new strategic visioning plan, to gain insight into how we're being called into the future. Over the years we have committed to working in coalition with other caucuses. Regardless of what new actions we may be called to, I expect some things will remain constant. We as an organization have always been about witnessing and being present to the church. We continue to be informed by the fringes of our constituency. By definition, we are the ones who have chosen to stay to do this. It's our role to speak of challenging issues as they evolve, such as holy unions and civil marriages; varieties of being in relationship, including bisexual, polyamorous, or whatever else may arise; and corrupt systems which continue to oppress everyone, including heterosexuals.

Affirmation will continue

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YES! Count me in for the work of Affirmation – increasing justice and love in the United Methodist Church – AND send me the welcome gift as indicated below. Gifts to Affirmation, a 501(c)3 nonprofit, are tax-deductible. Mail to: Affirmation, PO Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204-1021.

*Please attach your
newsletter label here
or fill in your name
and address*

Email address _____ Annual Conference _____

Phone _____ Please indicate: _____ Lay _____ Clergy

____ I am making a contribution now, in the amount of ____\$500 ____\$100 ____\$25 ____\$____ (fill in amount.)
Please make your check payable to *Affirmation*.

____ IN ADDITION TO MY GIFT AT THIS TIME, I am making a total pledge of \$____ to support Affirmation's efforts at General Conference 2004. This pledge is to be paid in two equal installments of \$____ in the months of March and April 2004. (I understand this pledge can be changed at any time by notifying Affirmation in writing.)

TO REWARD YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT, WE WILL SEND YOU A NICE GIFT, BASED – POLITICALLY INCORRECT AS IT MAY BE – ON YOUR LEVEL OF GIVING.

- With your gift of \$50 or more, we will send you a potluck selection of vintage Affirmation T-shirts in a variety of styles and sizes from previous General Conferences, while supplies last.
- With your gift of \$100, we'll send a copy of our daily General Conference newsletter (by e-mail if you give us an e-mail address, otherwise by snail mail that will arrive when the snail mail gets to it), sent from Pittsburgh. If you provide an email address, you will have the newsletter as it is being distributed at GC. Let us know whether you prefer PDF _____ or plain text _____. *(If you don't specify a preference we'll assume plain text)*
- With your gift of \$150, we'll send you both a T-shirt and the daily newsletter. We'll also acknowledge you as a GC Partner in our Summer 2004 newsletter.
____ Please DO NOT acknowledge my contribution in the "General Conference Partners" listing.
____ Please DO acknowledge my contribution in the "General Conference Partners" listing.
If you specify no preference we'll assume you do not want to be listed.

My gift/pledge is to be paid as follows:

____ Check enclosed/checks to be sent for additional pledge amounts. (Sorry, we are unable to send reminders.)

____ You are authorized to charge my: ____ Visa ____ MasterCard for my contribution now and the monthly installment amount indicated.

Acct No. _____ Expiration (month/year) ____/____

COMPLETE THIS SECTION FOR CHARGES

Name as it appears
on your account _____

Signature _____

Billing Address
(If different from above) _____

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRESSIVE UNITED METHODISTS

GENERAL CONFERENCE 2004 – PITTSBURGH PA – April 27 – May 7, 2004

Volunteer opportunities abound for progressive United Methodists who care about the future of the church and are willing and able to attend General Conference in Pittsburgh. Once again, Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns, the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA), and the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) will be coordinating housing and volunteer activities. Many plans are still being worked out. This form represents a preliminary indicator of your interests. Let us know of your interests by checking as many boxes as apply. As more information becomes available it will be forwarded to you. Thanks.

ADVOCACY

Prior to GC:

- ☐ Writing and editing petitions
- ☐ Developing position papers
- ☐ Analyzing legislation once Daily Christian Advocate comes out with all petitions (early 2004)

During Week One at GC:

- ☐ Monitor progress of legislation in legislative committees
- ☐ Participate in evening debriefings

During Week Two of GC:

- ☐ Monitor progress of legislation as it comes to the plenary session and be available to help with minority reports and/or talking points for progressive delegates.

CELEBRATION/WORSHIP

Willing to help with:

- ☐ Daily RMN communion services at noon on weekdays during GC
- ☐ Parents Reconciling Network Breakfast on Saturday Morning (5/1/04)
- ☐ MFSA Ball Award Event on Saturday Evening (5/1/04) with the Montana Logging and Ballet Company
- ☐ Sunday afternoon Reconciling Worship Service (5/2/04)
- ☐ Affirmation Worship service – time as yet to be determined

INFORMATION

Interested in:

- ☐ Gathering information for publications
- ☐ Writing articles
- ☐ Doing layout
- ☐ Editing

Interested in working on:

- ☐ MFSA Daily Social Questions Bulletin
- ☐ Press releases and other miscellaneous written material

Willing to do logistical work of:

- ☐ Getting newsletters and other information printed (usually late night task)
- ☐ Distributing information (usually a very early morning task)

WITNESS

Witness activities are in the planning stage as local logistics inform some activities. Indicate, however, if you are willing to consider participating in witness events such as Affirmation's Silent Witness at GC 2000.

- ☐ Silent Witnesses
- ☐ Street theatre (mime, skits)

OFFICE COVERAGE

- ☐ Helping provide office coverage

HOSPITALITY

Helping to prepare and serve meals:

- ☐ Breakfast at Progressive Delegates' Briefing
- ☐ Low cost lunches
- ☐ Helping provide office coverage
- ☐ Staffing Hospitality Center (including sale of materials)

CARE

- ☐ Providing pastoral care for volunteers and delegates
- ☐ Serving as "go-fers" for delegates including doing laundry, picking up prescriptions, etc.

ONGOING FAITHFULNESS

Throughout 2004, RMN will sponsor local events for Reconciling United Methodists across the country, gathering in local settings for community, celebration, support, and encouragement to "be the church" regardless of General Conference decisions. Likewise MFSA will be planning the next **Voices of Faith** gathering for progressive Christians to take place in 2005. **Those interested in helping with these events please indicate below:**

- ☐ I will organize/attend a RUM (Reconciling UMs) event in my area
- ☐ Please add me to the planning committee for MFSA's Voices of Faith Conference 2005

Name: _____
Address: _____
City State Zip _____
Day Phone: _____ Evening Phone: _____
Cell Phone: _____ Fax: _____
Annual Conference: _____
Email: _____

Mail to: MFSA,

212 E Capitol St NE
Washington DC 20003-1036 or

Fax to: MFSA at 202-546-6811

Length of Stay:

Number of days you hope to be present at General Conference _____

☐ Week One ☐ Week Two

Primary Affiliation: ☐ Affirmation

☐ MFSA ☐ RMN ☐ Other _____

Also Affiliated with ☐ Affirmation

☐ MFSA ☐ RMN ☐ Other _____

The information on this form will be forwarded by MFSA to Affirmation and RMN.

Drops of Water...

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water flows down, around, and through several of the most amazing waterfalls, coursing through the gorge that it has cut through the basalt that solidified in a crack in the solid granite of the mountain. It was astounding to me then to realize that this small stream had cut its way through solid rock.

I have been back to the Gorge several times, and a few years ago I even took my own bored pre-teen son to the Gorge and watched that same sense of wonder come over his face. Each time I return I am reminded that lasting change does not just come through cataclysmic eruptions, but can also come through the slow erosion of a persistent force on a seemingly impregnable object. The eroding effects of that small stream of water are clearly visible on Table Rock, and even more so when I stand in the Gorge and realize that this deep crack was formed by the persistent flow of water through time. I'm sure that many of us have had similar experiences, maybe at the Grand Canyon or some other natural wonder.

The United Methodist Church is in a time of struggle. The last General Conference was, to many, a cataclysmic event that brought turmoil and destruction. I have spoken to many people who attended GC2000 who were shocked and dismayed by the attitude of exclusion and distrust that was fostered by the actions of the General Conference. I have heard the voices of those who say that we need to move on from issues of inclusion and get on with the "business of the Church." When I hear that, I always wonder what their idea of the "business of the Church" is, if it does not put a priority on inclusion of those who have been most marginalized by society. I am also concerned about others who seem to feel that the battle is un-winnable and who, in frustration, give up, many times abandoning the church.

To both sides of the conflict, Affirmation's General Conference 2004 theme speaks of our commitment to the long, tiresome, thankless task of being the drops of water that will eventually

wear away the rocks of exclusion and bigotry. Based on Holly Near's and Meg Christian's 1970's song "The Rock Will Wear Away", it declares our solidarity with those of our number from the past who have given themselves to the effort, as well as those who will come in the future to continue our efforts. To those who hope by continuing a policy of exclusion based on distrust, misinformation, lies, and distortions, we say that we are here at this time to continue to be like drops of water to wear your opposition down. When we are gone, others will take our place to continue the struggle. The day will come when the rock of bigotry will wear away, and the light of God's love for all his people will come shining through like the sun shining through the forest into the darkness of the Flume.

"Can we be like drops of water falling on the stone

splashing

breaking

dispersing in air

**Weaker than the stone
by far but be aware that
As time goes by the rock
will wear away."**

*Meg Christian & Holly Near,
Singers & Songwriters, © 1976
Thumbilina Music BMI / Here-
ford Music ACAP*

Same-Sex Marriage Debate...

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I am transgender and as such, the same-sex marriage debate affects me in a somewhat different way than most. This November I will have been married to the same wonderful woman for forty years. The turbulences of our marriage had the added complexity of my gender identity struggles. That Jan has remained with me even through my gender transition has been one of the great joys of my life. Our relationship has become one of the few (now) same-sex marriages in New England. We are often viewed as a lesbian couple – something that straight-as-an-arrow Jan has had to struggle with. Each day I thank God for her.

So what do we have to gain from the same-sex marriage debate?

I want my many gay and lesbian friends to have the same opportunity I have to look across the table at age 60+ and see their partner of many years, and know that the commitment they have for each other is recognized by all. I want them to have the same rights I have from both the state and federal governments.

I am concerned that someday someone will look around and realize that there's a loophole that I fit in and try to plug it. One of the first reactions to the decision by the Bishop of Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference that a transsexual pastor was fit to be reassigned – after they successfully drove the pastor out of the UMC – was to immediately move to plug that loophole in the Discipline with legislation scheduled to be voted on at the next General Conference.

I'm getting tired of the "save marriage" cry from religious conservatives. Let them attack the real threats to marriage – divorce, spousal abuse, and child abuse. The legal issue of who may marry is one that needs to be settled by the government, without the moralizing of the issue by those who would demand that we all conform to their view of life. I suspect that eventually the people of Massachusetts will be required to settle the issue. That is the real battle yet to be fought.

MA Top Court Says LGBT Must Be Able to Marry

By Ken Rowe

In the first decision of its kind in the United States, but mirroring the Canadian decisions of 2003, the Massachusetts highest court has ruled that nothing less than marriage for LGBT couples is necessary and that Vermont-style civil unions are not at all equal.

The Associated Press reported the Feb. 4 decision with "The court issued the advisory opinion at the request of legislators who wanted to know whether civil unions would be enough to satisfy the court after its November ruling that said gay couples are entitled to all the rights of marriage. That decision had been written in such a way that it left open the possibility that civil unions might be allowed. But (the) opinion by the Supreme Judicial Court left no doubt: Only marriage would pass constitutional muster."

The state is planning a

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MA Top Court ...

constitutional amendment to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman and that could be on the ballot in 2006.

The 2004 General Conference of The United Methodist Church, will be called upon to address inequalities of access to civil rights. The church's stance on civil rights has been clear in the past, with the exception of marriage.

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Currently, the federal government and 38 other states have enacted laws barring the recognition of any gay marriages in other jurisdictions. Vermont recognizes marriage-like civil unions; California recognizes domestic partnership that grant gay couples nearly all the rights and benefits of full marriage, such as health insurance, hospital visitation and inheritance rights.

Where Do We Go...

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to proclaim that the church cannot be fully the church of God without us and anyone else some would prefer to exclude. From the beginning we desired to model church for the church.

From the beginning, we've looked forward to the day when there will no longer be the need for us to exist as an organization, the day the church has truly embraced and embodied the love of God for all. In the meantime, it is our responsibility to keep speaking explicitly of the pain in our community, around our issues and how they relate to the church. People are still dying, not only in other parts of the world through

brutal murders and torture, but also right here in our own country. Let's not forget our higher-than-normal suicide rate. We need to remember that this is a physical life and death issue for many people.

We've been here almost 30 years. We'll stay another 30, or another 30 if we need to, until the church acknowledges that everyone is part of the family of God. We continue to read the scriptures. We expect to be delivered. Regardless of what the church ever legislates, we know the love of God, and we live daily in the knowingness that God always, always, leads us home.

National Council

John R. Calhoun
South Central Jurisdiction
Oklahoma City, OK
[REDACTED]

Ms. Jay Campbell
South Central Jurisdiction
Houston, TX
[REDACTED]

Diane DeLap
At-Large
Wilmington, MA
[REDACTED]

Rev. Peggy R. Gaylord,
Co-Spokesperson
At-Large
Binghamton, NY
[REDACTED]

Walt Jackson
North Central Jurisdiction
Madison, WI
[REDACTED]

Kathryn Mitchem,
Co-Convener
Southeast Jurisdiction

Clarence R. (Rusty) Norment
At-Large
Mechanicsville, VA
[REDACTED]

Jim Palmquist
At-Large
Macungie, PA
[REDACTED]

Rev. Kenneth I. Rowe,
Co-Spokesperson
Western Jurisdiction
San Francisco, CA
[REDACTED]

Gary Shephard, Co-Convener
At-Large
Haslet, TX
[REDACTED]

Rev. Judy WestLee,
Newsletter Editor
Minneapolis, MN
[REDACTED]

Platform Statement ...

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Conference of The United Methodist Church. The document focuses on the traditional values of inclusion which our caucus has stood for since its founding in 1975 as well as highlight growing edges within the movement. The platform statement "We Are The Church" was informed by the work of a strategic visioning committee and local listening posts that occurred in these last two years.

Affirmation is the national caucus within The United Methodist Church for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns. The National Council meets three times a year in various parts of the United States and is made up of lay and clergy with leadership equally shared by men and women.

The platform reads:

Affirmation Platform 2004

We Are The Church.

***We, as Affirmation:
United Methodists for
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,***

and Transgender Concerns, call on the 2004 General Conference to act as Christ's Church to reject the powers of evil and proclaim an end to discrimination upon lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in church and society.

We support efforts at all levels to propose changes in The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church that acknowledge, support, and encourage growth and ministry of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth, adults, families, and allies. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Ordination***
- Appointment***
- Covenant relations***
- Supporting varieties of relationships***
- Affirming that the sacraments are available to all***
- Renouncing policies that promote discrimination and violence against LGBT people.***

We believe that the arguments over these issues are diversions to the church to keep The

United Methodist Church from reaching out to the least, the lost and the lonely in the world. We yearn to use our gifts for healing as Jesus directed us.

We affirm the independence and academic integrity of schools, colleges, universities, and seminaries related to The United Methodist Church.

We affirm the mission and integrity of all the general boards, agencies, and commissions.

We affirm the continued movement of local churches to celebrate "open hearts, open minds, and open doors." The 2004 General Conference is our time to put these words into Gospel action.

Affirmation historically has stood for making inclusiveness real in the church. Inclusiveness is rooted in the reality that all are saved in the redemptive act of Jesus Christ and that the

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Platform Statement

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church, those called by God's grace to follow Christ, consists of many members with different gifts. The church has often insisted that one of the parts of the body is actually the whole body, consequently denying the other parts of the body.

For the church to be fully the church, we United Methodists must root out the racism corroding its institutional life, the sexism continually reinforced by a system of male privilege, and the dependence on class privilege at the heart of our institutional functioning. We rejoice in the many gifts given by the Spirit to the church's many different parts, and deplore all efforts to exclude to any degree, whether by intention or effect, any group from participation in the life and ministry of the church. A diverse church celebrates the lives of individuals of all sexual orientations, genders, gender identities, gender expressions, racial/ethnic groups, physical and mental abilities, ages, and vari-

eties of relationships.

In 2004, we recommit to build Christ's Church for this and future generations: a church willing to witness, a church willing to grow, a church for all people who identify as United Methodists.

NATIONAL AFFIRMATION RETREAT SLATED OCTOBER 8-10, 2004

***"Hope and Healing:
Surviving in the
Wilderness"***

Continue to hold Oct. 8-10 for a time of sabbath and renewal together that will strengthen our witness into the future. Currently we are negotiating for a retreat center in the middle of the country, and will announce the exact location and leadership team in the next newsletter following General Conference.

Affirmation's Corporate Annual Meeting

The corporate annual meeting of Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Concerns, Inc., will be at 2 p.m. (1:30 sign-in and reception) Saturday, May 1, 2004. at Smithfield United Church, 620 Smithfield St., Pittsburgh, PA 15222.

All Affirmation members are invited to participate. The items of business will include:

- Elections of five members for three-year terms to the Board of Directors
- Election of members to fill vacancies on the Board of Directors
- Change all corporate papers to reflect the name "Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns"
- Report of the Strategic Visioning Plan
- and any other business that the Directors deem appropriate.

The Directors constitute the Affirmation Council.

Barnett-Charlton Union Feted

*By Kathryn L. Mitchem,
Affirmation Council
Co-Coordinator*

Affirmation's National Council was pleased and excited to be present for the great celebration Festival held at St. Marks United Methodist Church in Sacramento, CA Jan. 17 marking the fifth anniversary of Jeanne Barnett and Ellie Charlton's Holy Union/Covenant Service. Over 300 people filled the St. Mark's sanctuary, and overflowed the fellowship hall during lunch. Affirmation was honored to be the designated recipient of the day's offering, after expenses.

Invited to serve as greeters and ushers for the entire day, Affirmation Council members wore our identifying Affirmation shirts, enjoying many warm conversations with long-time Affirmation members, friends and constituents. Co-Spokesperson Peggy Gaylord spoke on our behalf during the afternoon session as part of the emphasis on "Where We Go From Here." Her excellent statement is printed elsewhere in this newsletter. Also speaking to the future were the Cal-Nevada Committee on Reconciliation, Rev. Karen Damman soon to be on trial in the Pacific Northwest

Conference, and Troy Plummer of the Reconciling Ministries Network. Other highlight presentations available are Ellie Charlton's "Remembering" statement on Affirmation's web page, and Dr. Mary Ann Tolbert's challenging speech "Keeping The Faith" on the web site for The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry at PSR (<http://www.clgs.org>).

The wonderful day was filled with music led by Jim and Jean Strathdee and sacred dancing by St. Mark's Dance Choir. Reader's theaters from the Cal-Nevada Conference Committee on Reconciliation titled "Those Whom God Hath Joined" and Lake Merritt United Methodist Church titled "Intimate Investigations" reminded us of our heritage and of the Holy Union's aftermath. We received powerful litanies drawn from letters written by persons whose lives were touched by Jeanne and Ellie's witness. It was indeed a celebration of God's presence in our past, present and future, woven together by the prayers of Rev. Faith Whitmore, Pastor of St. Marks, Rev. Karen Oliveto, co-chair of Reconciling Ministries Clergy, and Barbara Troxell, the first woman District Superin-

tendent in the Western Jurisdiction.

Writing about the event organizer Rev. Don Fado called the day "fantastic", filled with weeping and laughing and bonding together. He led in a time of remembrance for Jeanne Barnett and co-officiants of the Holy Union who have died. Don had opened the day by honoring the clergy and laity co-officiants present, and recognizing those present who had attended the Holy Union five years ago. He closed his written reflection of the anniversary celebration with the words "The Holy Spirit blew through the congregation, and our faith, for many of us, was rekindled and burns more brightly." Yes, Don's words are accurate for Affirmation's Council members too – we were strengthened by being there – thankful for the gift to our lives individually and to Affirmation as a whole. As our grateful tribute to Jeanne and Ellie in recognition of this Fifth Anniversary of their Holy Union, Affirmation will be reprinting Rev. Alice Knott's "Valentine Book" to be available during and following General Conference.

Our Martyr Names Sought

The LGBT issue is still a physical life and death issue for many of our brothers and sisters, not just an issue of what the church is going to do with us or allow us to do. Yes, it impacts us if we can't have holy unions or be ordained—but if we're not alive, these issues are irrelevant.

We are looking for names of LGBT United Methodists

(people who were somehow connected to the UMC however loosely—family, attendance, friends, partners, etc.) who were murdered or who committed suicide. Even if the name can't be published, we'd like to know of the instance. One suggestion is to create a web page of remembrance. Our intent is to focus on this message in our presence at General

Conference 2004.

Please send names and/or stories to Peggy Gaylord,

or [REDACTED]
Binghamton, NY [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Rainbow Stoles to Witness

The Parents Reconciling Network (PRN) announces a Stoles Project for GC 2004. All who feel called to witness on behalf of the full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons in the life of the church are urged to join with us in wearing a rainbow stole. PRN will have a commissioning ceremony of the stoles and their wearers at the beginning of General Conference, with daily, rolling commissioning on subsequent days as volunteers arrive.

The stoles are made of rainbow flame-like ribbon print on one side and white terry cloth of the other, measuring approximately 40" by 5". PRN is seeking

volunteers to sew the simple stoles. Patterns and materials will be provided to anyone who wishes to help. Other reconciling groups who wish to join this witness can obtain the pattern and material ordering information as well. Interested parties should contact Helen King [REDACTED].

It is PRN's plan to provide rainbow stoles free to sympathetic delegates. All others will be charged \$5 to offset the costs. We solicit your help and participation in this significant witness. You can help by sewing or by underwriting costs for the stoles!

**SAVE THIS DATE!
In Pittsburgh
during GC 2004**

**Friday, April 30
5 to 10 PM
The Andy Warhol
Museum
117 Sandusky St.
(412-237-8309)**

**Contact Vivian
Waltz [REDACTED]**

**Phil Wilson [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] or Peggy
Gaylord**

**[REDACTED]
with questions.
Admission will be
\$5 with beverages
and appetizers
available.**

**Watch for more
details.**

Exciting Street Theater Planned to Tell Our Stories - Join Us There

Street Theater gets our issues before delegates at General Conference in a way that gives information and helps change hearts. It makes LGBT people and their supporters visible and conveys messages while it is entertaining and fun to do. For GC 2004, Affirmation is working with Mary Gaddis on developing a Street Theater campaign. And she is the grand champion of Street Theater. Just to talk with her is a hoot!

We can enact a virtual coming out skit for delegates right in the Convention Center. Be a prophet with a written message for delegates like the prophets of the Old Testament. Music is a common language, so be with us to entertain with basic musical instruments like a homemade rain stick, tom-toms and a kazoo. How about sock puppet dialogues giving messages to delegates? That is, sock puppets having a conversation among the delegates in the lobbies of the Convention Center. The ideas are endless. Some

messages can be prepared in advance but others will also develop as issues arise at GC.

Street Theater is cheap to execute and with some plans and props before we get to Pittsburgh, we can really have some fun. Let us know you are interested by sending an email to Jim Palmquist at

Give us your name, address, email and phone number. Tell us if and when you expect to be at GC 2004 in Pittsburgh. If you have some ideas about Street Theater for GC 2004, send them along. We will hold a conference call among interested people in March or early April to get our ideas together and organize for GC-2004. Then we will meet in Pittsburgh around April 26 or 27 to implement our plans.

Join us at GC 2004 in Pittsburgh April 26 to May 8 and do some Street Theater with us. Let us know you are coming, ask your questions and help us plan for the fun. This could be one of the most powerful

things we do at GC this year. It helps make room for the Holy Spirit to act.

See you in Pittsburgh.

“Valentine Book” Reprints to be Available

As our tribute to the Fifth Anniversary of Jeanne Barnett and Ellie Charlton's Holy Union, Affirmation will reprint the “Valentine Book”.

First published in 1998 by Affirmation and edited by Alice G. Knotts, the “Valentine Book” is a compilation of ideas for covenant services for same-sex couples as well as the thoughts and emotions expressed by participants in 13 covenant celebrations. It includes a “thoughtful theological reflection on the meaning of joining two persons together.”

The book will be available on our General Conference resource table.

Affirmation Needs You --- Now

Would you consider taking the opportunity to shape the voice of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in The United Methodist Church? Affirmation is looking for new members for its governing Council. In addition to having a strong commitment to change the UMC to become more accepting and supportive of LGBT people, Council members are committed to attending three long-weekend meetings per year (travel expenses reimbursed) for up to three years, completing agreed-to tasks, and maintaining communication with other Council members.

Council members will be elected at the corporate meeting on May 1 in Pittsburgh. Please let Kathryn Mitchem

or any other Council member (see Council list on Page 6) know of your interest as soon as possible, especially if you are not going to be in Pittsburgh. We will accept nominations from the floor of the Annual Corporate Meeting. We much prefer, however, to have nominations in

advance as it will speed the meeting.

Self-nominations are encouraged: Unlike local settings, most in national leadership don't have a clue as to your time, talents, gifts and service; so we welcome you to come forward and offer yourself. Prospective Council members will be asked 10 questions about their commitment to work with Affirmation.

1. How familiar are you with Affirmation?
2. Are you committed to and supportive of the nature and mission of Affirmation?
3. Do you have past history of attending our meetings, working with one of the chapters or volunteering with us at General Conference?
4. Are you comfortable with and capable of representing the diverse experiences and perspectives of LGBT United Methodists?
5. Will you present commitments allow for adequate participation in three 3-4 day Council meetings a year, and

carrying out assignments between meetings including e-mail correspondence?

6. Are you sufficiently self-motivated so as to do the work of Affirmation on your own if no other Council members are close by?
7. Do you enjoy and/or can you tolerate demanding responsibilities in the midst of possible unappreciative, even hostile settings?
8. Can you work well with others, welcome and celebrate diversity and cultivate group relational skills?
9. Have you experienced the consensus model of decision-making and/or are willing to develop your skills further?
10. Will you ask for help if you are unclear about any aspect of Affirmation's mission and policies or your own role?

There will be opportunity to ask about or comment on anything else the nominee wishes.